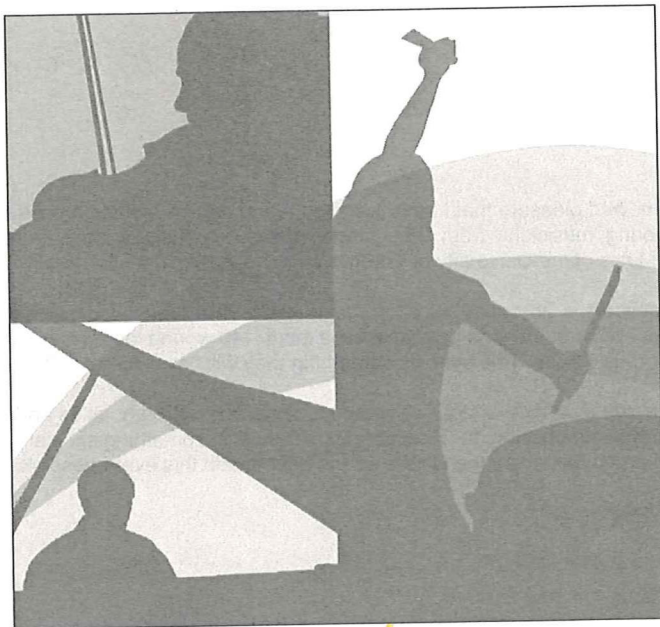


CD 2007--105

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO FACULTY OF MUSIC



2007-2008 SEASON

Dec 8/07



WHERE GREAT MINDS MEET GREAT MUSIC

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Conservatoire
de musique
et d'art dramatique

Québec

Dear Friends,

It is with renewed pleasure that I have watched the formation of this orchestra that brings together young musicians from the Conservatoire de musique de Montréal and the Faculty of Music of the University of Toronto.

Tonight's concert is an opportunity for you to share in a biennial event we have been privileged to be part of, one which sees almost 140 young performers convey their passion for music to us. This event is something they will never forget.

Once again, the evidence is clear — when students from different cities and schools are driven by the same passion, their collaboration results in something special. We can only cry *Bravo!*, and thank everyone whose efforts have made this event possible.

Nicolas Desjardins

Nicolas Desjardins
Acting Executive Director
Conservatoire de musique et d'art dramatique du Québec

Conservatoire
de musique
et d'art dramatique

Québec



Conservatoire de musique de Montréal

It is our great pleasure to welcome back to Toronto the young musicians of the Conservatoire de musique de Montréal, who are joining those of the University of Toronto Symphony Orchestra.

What a joy it is to watch these two orchestras, comprising some of the most talented young musicians in Canada, come together for the fourth time! These events, which allow students from the two establishments to get to know each other and collaborate, have become a tradition that benefits everyone.

I would like to thank and congratulate all those who contributed to the success of this grand project, namely Maestro Armenian, who conducts the two orchestras, and all the organizers in the two establishments, who have once again worked wonders.

Finally, I would like to extend my warmest thanks to all the young musicians on stage tonight for sharing their love of music with us.

Enjoy the concert!

Yves Daoust
Interim Director



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A Message from the Interim Dean

On behalf of the Faculty of Music I am delighted to welcome you to the fourth musical collaboration between the Conservatoire de musique de Montréal and the University of Toronto Symphony Orchestra.

I hope that you enjoy the music of Berg, Ravel and Strauss performed by these wonderful musicians under the leadership of Maestro Raffi Armenian, who has led this collaboration since its inception in 2002.

Thank you to everyone who has supported this initiative which is such a valuable experience for our students and such a pleasure for our audiences.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "R. Hartenberger". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Russell Hartenberger
Interim Dean

Saturday, December 8, 2007
7:30 pm. MacMillan Theatre

University of Toronto Faculty of Music
presents

**UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA &
L'ORCHESTRE DU CONSERVATOIRE DE MUSIQUE DE MONTRÉAL**
Raffi Armenian, conductor

PROGRAM

Three Orchestral Pieces, Op. 6

Alban Berg

Präludium
Reigen
Marsch

Alborada del gracioso

Maurice Ravel

INTERMISSION

Ein Heldenleben

Richard Strauss

Marie-Ève Poupart, violin solo

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Program Notes

Three Orchestral Pieces, Op. 6

ALBAN BERG (1885-1935)

"The first movement is the most glorious he ever wrote," gushed Berg in a letter to his wife, shortly after hearing the premiere of Mahler's Ninth Symphony in 1912. "It expresses an extraordinary love of this earth, for Nature; the longing to live on it in peace, to enjoy it completely, to the very heart of one's being, before death comes, as irresistibly it does." With the power of Mahler's music in his ear, a 28-year-old Berg set to work, the following year, on what would be his only purely orchestral work: *Three Orchestral Pieces*, Op. 6. Mahler's spell on the young Schoenberg disciple was such that he even borrowed Mahler's Ländler and march idioms, and to top it off, the "hammer blows" from the finale of the Sixth Symphony.

That Berg absorbed Mahler's influence, but without replicating the symphonist's sound, is immediately apparent when you hear this work. Like Mahler, the gestures are big and the orchestra appropriately large (quadruple winds, six horns, four trumpets, two pairs of timpani). But Berg takes the late-Romantic musical language in a new direction—towards atonality. In these pieces, he relies on sonorities themselves—complex chords with multi-layered timbres—to create tension, and by chipping away at these, to create release. In these pieces most chords have five or six different pitches (instead of just three or four in most tonal music); at climaxes, as many as 12 pitches—the full chromatic spectrum.

Präludium, framed by the rumble of percussion, introduces the work's luscious sonic landscape, a thick, dark world that is complex but not complicated. In *Reigen* (Round Dances), also in large ternary form, outer sections in duple metre book-end the central Ländler in triple time. The appearance of a solo violin and much starting and stopping make for a somewhat distorted, grotesque—even bizarre—dance. Stravinsky, who greatly admired this work, described the climactic passage

at the end of the middle section as "one of the most remarkable noises Berg ever imagined." The movement ends with the eery shimmering of high winds and strings. If the second piece is not quite a dance, then *Marsch* is hardly a march, at least not the type with which a general hoping to win a war would send off his troops. The movement is texturally thick, a "long, contrapuntal pile-up," according to one commentator. As the piece progresses, it accumulates bits and pieces that coalesce into a terrifying juggernaut. These are the densest textures Berg ever wrote. The composer and theorist George Perle sees the finale as Berg's reaction to war. "It is not a march," he observes, "but music *about* a march, or rather about the march, just as Ravel's *La Valse* is music in which the waltz is similarly reduced to its minimum characteristic elements."

Alborada del gracioso

MAURICE RAVEL (1875-1937)

Ravel's sparkling *Alborada del gracioso* (The Jester's Morning) of 1918 began its life as the fourth of five pieces in his Impressionistic piano suite *Miroirs* (1904-5). It is not hard to appreciate why Ravel, already in the habit of orchestrating his own piano pieces (*Valses nobles et sentimentales*, *Ma mère l'oye*), chose to arrange *Alborada*, a vibrant evocation of Spain etched in rapid-fire repeated notes and swirling glissandi. The piece opens with rhythmic guitar-like strumming in the pizzicato strings; later on rhythmic propulsion is supplied by musical machine-gunning in the winds and brass. In the slow middle section, a solo bassoon interrogates the percussion and divided strings, the latter entrusted with ethereal harmonics. When the opening section returns, this time with more punch, the strings tap the infectious rhythms *col legno* while the flutes and clarinets execute fantastic glissandi and tremolos. Castanets clamour away, as they did in the first part, at the head of an active percussion complement that drives the orchestra to a huge close.

This is the bright, colourful orchestration synonymous with Ravel, who a decade later would write his most famous orchestral work of all, *Bolero*—a piece about the orchestra—that proved timbre alone could carry a 15-minute *crescendo* on an obsessively repeating rhythm and melody. *Alborada* shares with *Bolero* the driving and syncopated rhythms so characteristic of Ravel's Spanish-inspired works. But the greater nuance of *Alborada* may be what the Spanish composer Manuel de Falla had in mind when he described Ravel's Spanish music as "subtly genuine".

Ein Heldenleben, Op. 40

RICHARD STRAUSS (1864-1949)

The program of *Ein Heldenleben* (A Hero's Life), premiered in 1899, is simple: a Hero, inspired by his true Love, confronts his Enemy, and after a grueling battle, triumphs. It all sounds rather ho-hum. That is, until you find out that the Hero is the composer himself, his Love is his wife Pauline, and the Enemy—the music critics. Then the whole thing strikes you as a bit megalomaniacal. Even more so when you realize that, in the recapitulation of this giant sonata-form tone poem organized into six continuous parts, Strauss inserts a dizzying succession of over 30 quotations from nine of his own works—a kind of musical retrospective conceived at the age of 34 to sum up his "life's" work. Such a display of artistic self-indulgence and self-aggrandizement was for a long time considered in poor taste, and the piece was squarely dismissed by the composer's detractors. Which is such a shame since the music has a rare vitality, richness, power—and above all—wit.

For any artist who has been the victim of a critic's invective, nothing is more deliciously satisfying than to hear the critics portrayed in the scherzo-like second section by spiky winds, a slimy oboe, snarly muted trombones and slow-witted tubas moving in parallel fifths. For anyone else—critics included—it's amusing at the very least. But what prompts the critics' chatter? It's the Hero's proud manner, of course, launched right from the start by his

audacious and exuberant theme that spans three octaves—a bold and manly statement if there ever was one. (And what a sight it must have been to have witnessed the premiere conducted by Strauss himself, as if declaring to the world, "Here I am in all my glory!")

The Hero's theme, the nagging critics—and now comes a tender *adagio*, in which the Hero's Companion (Strauss's wife, Pauline) is portrayed by the solo violin in what is surely one of the most involved and virtuosic solo parts in the orchestral literature. The violin races through all sorts of moods representing the many facets of Pauline's character—skittish, vivacious, loving, sentimental and many others. Meanwhile a slow and heavy-sounding orchestra, presumably the world-weary Strauss, slugs along trying to keep up with the violin. Eventually, Love coaxes the Hero back to life: the kindling finally catches and the orchestra erupts into flames. Our Hero is rejuvenated by Love—and just in time for the Battle.

And what a battle scene it is! Real or metaphysical, the battle rages on like an uncontrollable fire. The charge is led by a trumpet call so angular that it would find a nice home in a Shostakovich symphony. To the grinding steps of a military march, all hell breaks loose, unleashing the din of clashing metal in which earlier themes vie for supremacy. At the peak of this noisy development bursts forth the Hero's theme declaring victory. Not until Prokofiev's famous "Battle on the Ice" from *Alexander Nevsky* would war be made to sound so visceral.

The fifth part begins as a recapitulation. But it soon veers off into a jaunt through Strauss's thematic catalogue that he conceived programmatically as the Hero's "works of peace". First we hear a statement in the horns from *Don Juan*, then snippets from his other tone poems: *Also sprach Zarathustra*, *Tod und Verklärung*, *Don Quixote*, *Till Eulenspiegel* and *MacBeth*. The themes recalled from these (and other) works are mostly love themes and thus relate to Pauline, the Hero's inspiration. A vast coda rounds off the six-part continuous structure.

"As Beethoven's *Eroica* is so very unpopular with our conductors and therefore is seldom performed nowadays," wrote Strauss, tongue-in-cheek, to his publisher in 1898, "I am now composing, in order to meet a pressing need, a big tone poem entitled *Heldenleben* (true,^{iv} it has no funeral march, but it is in E-flat major and has lots of horns, which are of course well versed in heroism." The failure to detect a healthy dose of irony in this statement has contributed to a gross misunderstanding of *Ein Heldenleben*. And by Strauss's own admission, the work isn't nearly as autobiographical as it was made

out to be by his contemporaries. "I'm no hero," he confessed to Romain Rolland. "I haven't got the necessary strength; I'm not made for battle; I much prefer to go into retreat, to be peaceful and to rest." So in the end, *Ein Heldenleben* may not really be about Strauss the Composer-Hero. We might just as well think of it as a vivid portrayal of any individual who overcomes adversity by finding solace in love and creative work.

Notes © 2007 by Robert Rival, doctoral candidate in composition in the Faculty of Music. www.robertrival.com

Biography

Maestro **Raffi Armenian** graduated from the piano performance class of Bruno Seidlhofer at the Academy of Music in Vienna, Austria. He further studied at Imperial College, University of London, England, before completing his studies at the Vienna Academy of Music with Hans Swarowsky (orchestral conducting), Rheinhold Schmid (choral conducting) and Alfred Uhl (composition). He also took private voice lessons with Ferdinand Grossmann.

In 1969 Raffi Armenian immigrated to Canada, where he became Artistic Director of the Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony for 22 years. The Raffi Armenian Theatre in Kitchener, which he helped to design, is considered one of the best performance spaces in North America, both for its acoustics and its design features. In 1974, as Music Director of the Stratford Festival, he founded the Canadian Chamber Ensemble, which achieved international recognition with tours in North and South America, and Europe.

Raffi Armenian has guest conducted all of the major orchestras in Canada, as well as in Belgium, Italy, the United States, and the Jeunesses Musicales World Youth Orchestra. Equally at home on the operatic podium, he has conducted productions in Toronto, Montreal, Detroit, Columbus and Indiana, in a vast repertoire, including Berg's *Wozzeck* for the Canadian Opera Company, Toronto, and Stravinsky's *Rake's*

Progress. From 1982 to 1985 he was Artistic Director of the Opera Studio of Opera de Montreal. In 1989, he conducted the final public appearance of the great Canadian tenor Jon Vickers, in a concert performance of Wagner's *Parsifal*. In March 2006, he led the University of Toronto Opera Division in four performances of *The Marriage of Figaro* by Mozart.

Raffi Armenian's work has received countless honors including the Canadian Grand Prix du Disque for *Serenades*, and an Emmy Award nomination for the TV performance of Menotti's *The Medium* starring Maureen Forrester. Woody Allen used his CD *Music from Berlin in the 1920s* as background music for his film *Shadows and Fog*. He is a recipient of Honorary Doctorates from the University of Waterloo and Wilfrid Laurier University, and the Golden Jubilee Medal of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. In 1989 he was invested into the Order of Canada.

Raffi Armenian has long been active as a pedagogue. In 1981 he became a Professor of the Orchestral Conducting Class in addition to conducting the Orchestra at the Conservatoire de Musique in Montreal, a position he continues to hold. In 1997 he accepted a two-year post as Visiting Guest Professor at the Hochschule für Musik und Darstellende Kunst, in Graz, Austria, and since September 1999 Mr. Armenian has been Director of Orchestral Studies at the University of Toronto.

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Eun A Jo
Joyce Kim
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